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THE MUSICAL TIMES,
And Singing Class Circular.
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INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF MOZART.

By W. B. M. MEASOR.

JUST three years before the death of the immortal Handel, whose works had attracted the attention of the musical world for their great originality and sublime conceptions, it was destined that a man equally remarkable and not less gifted should confer honour upon the same Fatherland. John Chrysostom Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart was born at Salzburg, in Austria, on the 17th of January, 1756, and possessing in a rare degree those natural qualifications for excellence in the science and art of music with which few are endowed, he had the advantage of being under the guidance of a father who was no mean musician himself, and soon learned to appreciate that astonishing gift which his son had inherited and which was to render his name famous to all future generations. The history of Mozart is the history of a musical prodigy. Like the "divine Raphael" in a sister art, his life was cut short at a comparatively early age, but his musical career commenced with his childhood, and during the few years of his life he achieved a reputation in almost every department of music such as no other master of the art has ever attained. He was not three years of age when his father perceived indications of that wonderful genius that was hereafter to astonish the world. What to other children was a work of time, and irksome withal, the young Mozart mastered without the slightest difficulty. It required no more than half an hour's study to enable him to perform a minuet on the piano, and the most difficult pieces were performed by him with the utmost accuracy and precision by an apparently intuitive effort. Nothing seemed to be beyond his powers, and by the time he had attained his fifth year, he could not only play any piece that was placed before him, but had commenced to form compositions of his own, which his father, before whom he performed them, committed to writing. It is a remarkable fact that, in proportion to the progressive development of his musical genius, Mozart lost all taste for those boyish amusements in which children of his age are in the habit of engaging. Music had enthralled his soul to such a degree that he was her captive, and hers alone. No pastime could afford him the slightest interest where music did not form a part. In corroboration of this, it is asserted that an attached friend of the family would occasionally assist him in removing his toys and playthings from one room to another, but on such occasions we are told that Mozart would not allow such a removal to take place unless it were accompanied by a song or a march played on the violin by one of the party.

Before he had completed his sixth year it was determined to exhibit to the world this youthful prodigy, and his father, with a parent's pride, resolved to display his son's extraordinary powers in the principal capitals of Europe. By these means he doubtless hoped to reimburse himself for the heavy sacrifices of time and income which he had incurred in the education of his children; for, besides his son, he had a daughter who accompanied them in their travels, and whose likeness was painted, conjointly with that of her gifted brother, by Carmontelle, and engraved during their subsequent visit to Paris, in 1763. The expectations which Mozart's father had formed respecting the success of this tour were abundantly realised, for not only did his son command the admiration and applause of the musical world and the public, but he also attracted the notice of monarchs, who vied with each other in testifying by their munificence to his surpassing genius. Munich was chosen to be the scene of their *début*, and whilst in this city, Mozart and his sister played several times in the presence of the Elector of Bavaria. They then proceeded to Vienna, where they soon received the commands of the Emperor, Francis the First, to repair to Schönbrunn and enliven the imperial court with their wonderful performance. During this visit many anecdotes are related of the young Mozart. The Emperor and the Empress, Maria Teresa, loaded him with caresses and presents; and his father relates, in a letter to a friend, that on one occasion the boy, in a moment of gratitude, sprang on the lap of the Empress, took her round the neck, and kissed her. He had now far outdistanced his father in musical knowledge, and began to feel his superiority as a musician to those by whom he was usually surrounded. He had a great reluctance to perform before those who were not capable of appreciating the power with which he could command the instrument. On one occasion, it is stated that, when about to play before the Emperor, observing that his audience consisted of courtiers only, he said, "Is Herr Wegenseil not here? *he* understands music." This worthy, who was the imperial chapel master, at length arrived, Mozart not having dared to commence in his absence. The latter then appeared to feel relieved, and cried out, "I am going to play a concerto of yours, you must turn over the leaves for me."

The Emperor, who used to call him his little magician, remarked to him that there was nothing extraordinary in being able to perform on the piano when the player saw the keys. Mozart, without a moment's hesitation, had the keys covered and played as before. "There is something which I should like you to try," said the Emperor; "your familiar spirit has as yet achieved nothing remarkable. If you can play with but one finger, I shall acknowledge that to be indeed worthy of him." Mozart was not disconcerted, appearing not to regard the request as anything extraordinary, and with the greatest ease, and to the astonishment of all present, he played several pieces in the manner prescribed. Like children of his tender years, he was not abashed in the presence of Royalty, but made himself perfectly at home in the Imperial court, and became quite a pet amongst the ladies. He was one day wandering up and down in the palace, accompanied by two archduchesses, when he slipped and fell upon the polished floor. The Archduchess Marie Antoinette, afterwards the unhappy Queen of France, lifted him up and spoke some kind words to him, "You are a dear good lady," said Mozart, "and you shall be my wife."

In 1763, Mozart, accompanied by his father and sister, set out on another and more extended journey. They travelled through a great part of Germany, and in every place where they appeared, the wonderful performances of the youthful musician, both on the organ and the pianoforte, created the greatest

enthusiasm, and were rewarded with substantial, and even splendid tokens of admiration. His fame had preceded him to Paris, where he was received with great kindness and distinction by the Bavarian ambassador. At Versailles he was presented to the Royal Family, and played on the organ in the King's Chapel in a style equal to that of the very best masters. Besides taking part in two concerts at Paris, he composed several sonatas, and universally received the homage due to his genius. In the following year he visited England, and was much patronised by George III., who was a good musician, and fully appreciated the talents of the young artist. During his residence in London, at a time when he was slowly recovering from an illness which had placed his life in danger, he composed a symphony for a full orchestra, besides six sonatas, which he dedicated to the Queen.

There is a singular account of Mozart, who was astonishing everybody by his remarkable powers at so young an age, contained in a letter from the Honourable Daimes Barrington to Dr. Maty, the Secretary of the Royal Society. It is dated November 28, 1769, and appears in the "Philosophical Transactions," vol. 60. After alluding to this wonderful boy, who was then taking the musical world by storm, he gives an instance of his precocious and unprecedented powers, and endeavours to explain to the uninitiated the difficulties with which he had to contend. "I carried to him," said he, "a manuscript duet, which was composed by an English gentleman to some favourite words on Metastasio's opera of *Demofoonte*. The whole score was in five parts, viz., accompaniments for a first and second violin, the two vocal parts, and a bass. Let it be imagined, therefore, that a child of eight years old was directed to read five lines at once, in four of which the letters of the alphabet were to have different powers. For example, in the first line A to have its common powers; in the second that of B; in the third that of C; in the fourth that of D. Let it be conceived also that the lines so composed of characters with different powers are not ranged so as to be read at all times one exactly under the other, but often in a desultory manner. Suppose, then, a capital speech in Shakespeare, never seen before, and yet read by a child of eight years old with all the pathetic energy of a Garrick. Let it be conceived likewise that the same child is reading with a glance of his eye three different comments on this speech tending to its illustration, and that one comment is written in Greek, the second in Hebrew, and the third in Etruscan characters. Let it be also supposed that by different signs he could point out which comment is most material upon every word, and sometimes that perhaps all three are so, at others only two of them. When all this is conceived, it will convey some idea of what this boy was capable of in singing such a duet at sight in a masterly manner from the score, throwing in at the same time all its proper accompaniment." When we read of children who have been able to carry on the most elaborate processes of mental arithmetic, and have arrived at results which could be attained by men who had given their whole lifetime to figures only, after a course of laborious calculations on paper, we may regard nothing to be impossible to that intuitive power which is the mark of true genius. The wonder seems to be, as it appears to have struck Mr. Barrington, that mechanical difficulties are overcome, and in the case of Mozart it certainly must have appeared remarkable that a mere child should, in order to gratify his passion for music, be able to set at naught apparently physical impossibilities. He accomplished his task, we are told, to the astonishment of every one. He had never seen either the words or the music before, but yet, without a moment's hesitation, he interpreted the ideas of the composer in a manner which not even the most experienced musician could have surpassed. But a life which was begun with so much mental strain was not likely to endure. The constant tax upon his powers which Mozart was daily in the habit of inviting, though perhaps hastening his decay, enabled him to enrich the world of music with compositions which in their peculiar line have never been approached.

He remained fifteen months in England, and then sailed for Holland. After passing through Flanders, he paid a second visit to Paris, and afterwards made the tour of the south of France and of Switzerland, returning, after an absence of three years, to his native city. He here devoted himself for some time with the greatest ardour to the higher branches of musical composition and to the diligent study of the works of the best writers on counterpoint, Emanuel, Bach, Hassé, and Handel being his models. The ancient Italian masters he also regarded with much favour, considering them in many respects greatly superior to the modern.

In 1768, when about twelve years of age, he revisited Vienna, and there, at the command of the Emperor Joseph II., composed an *opera buffa*, which was entitled, "*La Finta Semplice*." It was at this early period of his career that he was for the first time exposed to the envy and detraction which sooner or later fall to the lot of all who become the objects of the favour and applause of the public whilst others are competing for the like reward. So powerful was the party leagued against him in Vienna that his opera was never performed, although it had elicited the praise of connoisseurs like Hassé and Metastasio. But however keenly the young and sensitive artist may have felt and resented the too successful machinations of those who envied or were incapable of appreciating his genius, the memory of the disappointment to which he was subjected was soon effaced by a visit to Italy, the land of poetry and song, which at that time held the same undisputed pre-eminence in music which for so many years it asserted in the sister arts of painting and sculpture. His reception here must have been very gratifying to his feelings, especially after the cold neglect which he had endured in the country he had just left. Whilst at Milan he was commissioned to compose an opera for the aproaching carnival, and at the age of fourteen wrote his *Mithradates*, which had twenty representations, and brought him much applause. In Bologna, in Florence, and in Naples he excited the liveliest enthusiasm amongst the susceptible Italians, and received many marks of distinction, as preludes to the still higher honours which awaited him in Rome. Whilst at Bologna, it was predicted by P. Martini, celebrated in the science of counterpoint, that Mozart would one day be without a rival. The Philharmonic Academy, desirous of associating with themselves the young German, were under the necessity of making him undergo the customary examination required of all candidates for membership in their body. He was shut up in a room where

a theme was furnished him for a fugue for four voices. In half an hour he had performed his part, and immediately received his diploma, an honour which had never before been granted to one of so young an age. He was much sought after in the Court of Tuscany, and wished to remain there, but he was desirous of hastening his journey to Rome, as he was anxious to be present there during the solemnities of the Holy Week. It was at this season that he entered the Eternal City, and it may easily be imagined with what eagerness he would repair to the Sistine chapel to listen to the sublime music for which the services of that holy season are so celebrated. It is well known that of some portions of that music, for instance, the *Miserere* of Allegri, no copies are allowed to be taken, under severe penalties for the infraction of the rule. But the prohibition was useless where Mozart was concerned. He had placed himself in a corner, and gave particular attention to the piece as it proceeded. On leaving the chapel he made a note of the whole, and having, on Good Friday, attended a second performance, and assured himself of the accuracy of the copy which he had made, and which he held concealed in his hat, he attended next day before the Academy, and, to the astonishment of all who heard him, he accompanied himself on the piano, whilst he sang before the assembled musicians the very music of Allegri, which it was supposed no one would be able to give unless furnished with a copy, which the rules of the Vatican had apparently rendered it impossible to obtain. This wonderful feat produced a great sensation in Rome, and people began to believe that the sportive allusion of the Emperor to Mozart's familiar spirit had some foundation in fact, and a report gained ground that the remarkable faculty with which he appeared to be gifted, resided in the talismanic effect of a ring which he wore. On hearing this, the supposed magician drew the ring from his finger, and showed the groundlessness of the current idea by exhibiting no signs of any diminution of that wonderful power of execution which had hitherto astonished his auditors. Mozart's triumph was now complete. He was loaded with honours and admitted to an audience by the Pope, Clement XIV., who desired that the extraordinary child should be presented to him. The Holy Father, far from upbraiding him for having transgressed the rule laid down relative to Allegri's music, accorded to him a most gracious reception, and in recognition of his wonderful talents, Mozart received from the hands of the Pontiff the cross and order of a knight of the Golden Spur.

We are now approaching that period of Mozart's career when the scene changes, when—the wonder of his childhood having passed away—the world seemed to grow indifferent to its former idol, and when, instead of being caressed by princes and extolled by musicians and *dilettanti*, he was doomed to encounter opposition and to struggle with poverty. Not long before his departure for Italy he had been appointed chapel master to the Archbishop of Cologne, but that prelate seems to have been incapable of appreciating the value of Mozart's talent. The latter had laboured most assiduously in his service, and had produced a number of compositions, including masses, litanies, and concertos, but was never able to awaken the apathetic ecclesiastic to a sense of his merit, or to extort from him any augmentation of the scanty pittance which was annexed as a salary to the office which he held. He had longed for his fatherland, but arrived there only to become more and more disgusted with the treatment to which he was now ignominiously exposed. He resolved, therefore, to abandon his native place, and to try once more his fortune in the world, being on this occasion accompanied by his mother. In the German Courts which he visited, he was admired and applauded as before, for his genius could not fail to attract the attention of all true lovers of music. In Gluck, whose acquaintance he made in Vienna, he found a kindred spirit, and through his society and the study of his works, he acquired those principles of the musical art which were so successfully developed in his subsequent dramatic compositions. He was equally anxious to be introduced to the celebrated Haydn, whom he ever afterwards spoke of and regarded as his master in those studies to which they both so effectually devoted their time and attention. But, much as the commanding genius of Mozart could not fail to be recognised, it seemed powerless to obtain for its possessor more than barren praise. After in vain lingering in Munich in the hope of obtaining from the Elector, who had been one of the most ardent admirers of his early performances, some situation worthy of his talents and of his fame, he at length determined to revisit Paris, and seek in that capital for something more solid than the merely empty honours which he was able to reckon upon in his native country.

(*To be continued.*)

THEATRICAL ORCHESTRAS.

By Henry C. Lunn.

The engagement of an orchestra in a theatre exclusively devoted to dramatic entertainments has always appeared to us one of those absurd anomalies which only exists because nobody thinks of questioning the rationality of it. In the olden times of musical melodramas and operatic comedies, there could be no question that it was an indispensable portion of a theatrical establishment. The lessee had then to engage not only a band, but a director of the music, who was forced to work to order, and consequently to produce innumerable compositions which he might himself despise. If a melodrama, for instance, were brought into the theatre and accepted, a memorandum of the music required was immediately given into the hands of the composer to the theatre, with an understanding that it should be ready for rehearsal on a certain day. As he was usually well up to the *business* of the stage, however, this was generally a work of little time. Tender strains ushered in the "acknowledged heroine;" grim discords announced the villain; "hurries" were got ready for the combats and struggles; and a comic song for the faithful countryman. As the principal female character had been, of course, inveigled from her native village, the overture would usually contain a reminiscence of her happy home, which reminiscence would probably be repeated at intervals throughout the piece, and form a distinguishing feature in the final *tableau*, when the father, mother, and three or four villagers, who had walked five hundred miles over the mountains in search of her, bent over the heroine and pointed up to the flies.

All this was, of course, to the composer a mere mechanical matter, which might, like every other